Statement

Infrastructure for Sustainable Development for All

The SDGs are "global goals" but they are often pursued in the contrasting realities of developing and developed world. Our implementation strategy for the SDGs must consider, and be tailed to suit, these different realities. So should our discussions on infrastructure, which must take into account local conditions and realities.

The role and objectives of infrastructure in the developing world are and should be different from those in the developed world. Infrastructure for sustainable development must address the needs of underprivileged, developing, and rural societies. On the other hand, it must inspire responsibility in more affluent and developed societies. The strategy we put forward for infrastructure should thus be two pronged, addressing both halves of the globe.

In the developing world, where the vast majority of the world's poor reside, tackling poverty should be the primary focus of infrastructure. In other words, the most important connection for infrastructure in the developing world must be to SDG 1: no poverty.

Of the 700 million people lifted out of poverty during the MDG period, 500 million were from China. State-led infrastructure and industrial development was critical in enabling this change in China — creating jobs, access to jobs, and better living conditions. The strategy of state led infrastructure development for emerging economies should be revisited and embraced by the international community. It remains critical to global growth.

A focus on SDG 1 does not mean exclusion of the other SDGs. It means only a reasonable concession to economic, historical, and practical realities. Chinese infrastructure projects have not only helped to eradicate poverty; they have also helped realize progress in other SDG areas, such as providing access to a variety of services. And while China faces environmental challenges, it is also working to develop more sustainable infrastructure, such as renewable energy and high-speed rail.

China's more recent infrastructure projects are indicative of the role infrastructure should play in the developed world. In the developed world, where per capita GHG emissions are multiples of the world average, the primary focus of infrastructure should be SGDs 11 and 12: sustainable production and consumption in sustainable communities. The developed world must return to a lifestyle that emphasizes sustainability as a core value that distinguishes between needs and wants. Infrastructure can help drive this change.

Infrastructure in the developed world must help to promote the development of communities which are frugal and resource efficient. Urbanization, sustainable transport, and ICTs are all forms of infrastructure that can help to achieve this end. Building convenient public transport in areas once dominated by the automobile is one example of how infrastructure can help promote sustainability. ICTs that eliminate the need for travel altogether are another.

Ultimately, every one of us, rich and poor, in rural and urban communities, has a role to play in the achievement of the SDGs. In realizing a world that develops sustainably, we share a common denominator of respect: respect for our fellow man's needs, for nature's needs, for future generations' needs, and for humanity's spiritual needs.